

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 178 177

PS 010 958

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TITLE The Influence of Family Climate and Family Process on Child Development.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Rockville, Md.
PUB DATE Aug 79
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Meetings of the International Council of Psychologists (Princeton, NJ, August, 1979)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Empathy; *Family Characteristics; *Family Environment; *Family Relationship; Individual Differences; *Interaction Process Analysis; Interviews; *Personality Development
IDENTIFIERS *Family Individuation; Moos Family Environment Scale

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between the degree of individuation in families and the personality development of adolescent family members. A subsample of 30 white, middle-class families were chosen for analysis from a larger sample of 99 families. Fifteen families from the subsample had adolescent girls who scored high, and fifteen had adolescent girls who scored low on Loevinger's measure of ego development, the California Personality Inventory, and a sociometric questionnaire. All families participated in a 2-hour structured home interview which included revealed difference exercises (RDE) for the entire family, and a projective task in which family members described their family system. Both of these tasks were used to assess the degree of "individuation" in a family. A highly individuated family is conceived as one where individual differences are accurately perceived and accepted. Family individuation should be reflected in the family's interaction process by greater comfort with ambivalence and disagreement, and by higher levels of mutual support and validation. It was hypothesized that a family climate of individuation would enhance the adolescent's development by nurturing the adolescent's self-esteem. The results confirmed this hypothesis: parents of the high-scoring adolescents were better able to accept differences between them and to discuss disagreements constructively, compared to parents of the low-scoring adolescents. (Author/SS)

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The Influence of Family Climate and
Family Process on Child Development*

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*The research was supported in part by grants from the
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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is the investigation of the relationship between family climate and child development. 99 families participated in a 2-hour structured home interview. Families were selected through local high schools, and each contained an adolescent girl who had previously completed a number of psychological and sociometric tests. The home interview included a revealed difference exercises for parents and for the entire family, and a projective task in which family members described their family system.

The family system level variable of most interest in this research is individuation. In an individuated family interpersonal boundaries are clear; individual differences are accurately perceived and accepted. Results of analyses to date support individuation as an important concept for understanding the effects of the family and the children. Adolescents who score high on the psychological and sociometric measures come from families which appear to be more individuated both in terms of their self descriptions and in terms of a projective measure. Parents of these high-scoring adolescents seem to be better able to accept differences between them and to discuss disagreements constructively than are parents of low-scoring adolescents.

The development of children occurs, to a large extent, within the particular climate and subculture of the family of which they are a part. Within a particular family system, the child learns when and how to express feelings, manage conflict, and negotiate differences. Early examples of variables used to describe family systems include "family rule" (Jackson, 1970) and "family theme" (Hess and Handel, 1959). Family rules are statements about observed redundancies in relationships; an example of a rule would be "when the people in this family are depressed, one of the children fights with another one." A family theme could be high achievement motivation, or a high degree of concern about loss and separation. A family climate variable considered important by many family therapists and researchers is "individuation" (see Anonymous, 1972; Karpel, 1976; Minuchin, 1974). Individuation refers to a quality of the individual boundaries in a relationship. In individuated families, individual boundaries are clear and permeable. That is, individual difference (uniqueness) is comfortably allowed; at the same time, individual identities are clear and strong enough to allow sharing and intimacy.

Perhaps equally important to the development of the child as the general climate of the family, is the child's particular place or role in the family system. Several family researchers and therapists (Haley, 1967; Bell and Vogel, 1968; Anonymous, 1972) have noted the detrimental effects for a child when parents, in reaction to stress in the marital system, pull the child into the system to stabilize it. The process is called "triangulation." Bowen has proposed that when the relationship between two people is under stress, they will pull in ("triangle") a third party as a way of managing that stress.

Our research focuses both on family climate variables and on the role of a particular person in the family, as important to individual functioning. We are particularly interested in interaction process analyses as a means of measuring family variables. During the last three years we have developed, discarded, revised and refined several interaction process scales and are presently scoring marital and family interaction protocols on a stratified sample of 75 of 99 families interviewed. The present paper summarizes our results to date, primarily based on analyses of 30 families: 15 families of adolescent girls scoring high on a number of psychological and social measures, and 15 families of adolescent girls scoring low on these measures.

Overview of Project

A primary, organizing construct for us is the concept of individuation, a concept reflecting the pattern of relationships and interpersonal distances among people in a family (or other group). In a highly individuated family, boundaries between individuals are clear, yet permeable. Respect for individuality, uniqueness, similarity, and difference is the ground for true mutuality and thus for cohesiveness and intimacy among family members. In unindividuated families, individual boundaries are not clear. Family members project owned and/or disowned parts of the self onto others. For instance, in an unindividuated family or family subgroup, individuals may experience an enmeshed sense of "we-ness" in which there is not delineation between own and others' feelings. If I'm sad my sense is that the other is also sad. An example of projection of unowned aspects of the self into another would be a marriage in which the myth is that she had feelings and he is rational--she senses and expresses feelings for both; he accepts all responsibility for making decisions. In an individuated family, each member is more complete, more aware and accepting of all parts of the self. Also each person's characteristics are perceived with a high degree of accuracy, unclouded by projections of the perceiver's own needs and feelings.

The term individuation comes from Mahler (1975), who uses it to describe the child's dawning awareness of his/her psychological autonomy from the mothering figure. However, whereas Mahler used the term to refer to the child's individual developmental process as it is affected by the relationship between the mother and child, we are using the term at the system level as a description of a family group.

We will use the term differentiation to refer to the complementary process within the individual. The differentiated individual has a clearly delineated self construct, and behavior is based on a clear awareness of own attitudes and needs rather than on a subjective emotional awareness. Bowen describes undifferentiated individuals as follows:

People in the lower half of the (differentiation) scale live in a 'feeling' controlled world in which feelings and subjectivity are dominant over the objective reasoning process most of the time. They do not distinguish feeling from fact, and major life decisions are based on what 'feels' right.....So much life energy goes into seeking love and approval, or attacking the other for not providing it, that there is little energy left for self-determined, goal-directed activity. (Anonymous, 1972, p. 119)

The greater the differentiation, the less emotional fusion with others. Thus there is a positive correspondence between individuation in families and level of differentiation in particular family members.

Two kinds of unindividuated families have been described by Salvador Minuchin (1974), enmeshed and disengaged. Enmeshed families have diffuse individual boundaries, with a high level of communication and concern. The closeness is a pseudomutuality (Wynne, 1958), to some degree a fusion of personalities. Enmeshed families are unable to differentiate individuals. There is a pervasive sense of "we-ness", we feel, we want, we are. Disengaged families have inappropriately rigid ego boundaries with angry communications among individuals. These families have developed a pseudo-autonomy for family members based on the denial of similarities between family members. In disengaged families rigid interpersonal boundaries protect weak individual identities. In both kinds of unindividuated families, how I feel and think is a more important determinant of how I perceive your inner states and behavior than is what you actually feel, think or do. This is because persons in unindividuated families project their own feelings onto others. In enmeshed families, others are seen as the same as the self. In disengaged families, the unwanted aspects of the self are projected onto the other, and the other is seen as different from the self. All unindividuated families, of course, do not fall neatly into one of these categories. One often sees an enmeshed parent and child with another family member "cut off", seemingly isolated from the family system. Minuchin's types do describe many families, however, and they provided the impetus for one of our measures of individuation.

In unindividuated families, similarity connotes support, and difference, rejection. As Karpel (1976) has pointed out, for the undifferentiated persons in unindividuated families, the experience of "I" and "We" are felt to be conflicting alternatives. The only options available are the close secure "We" with the accompanying loss of self (enmeshed) or the rigidly independent "I" with the accompanying isolation and loneliness. In individuated families the poles of "I" and "We"

are integrated in such a way that they nourish one another and are, in fact, meaningless without one another. The more strongly individuated the couple, the more capable they are of forming a... dialogic relationship that furthers their continuing self-delineation.
(Karpel, 1976, pp. 69-70)

Thus, it is that individuated families, while enjoying more autonomy and uniqueness of self, are also able to enjoy greater intimacy and mutual support.

Origins of Individuation.

The level of family individuation in a family may be seen to derive from parental self concepts. Parents with clearly differentiated selves have a more realistic perception of self and others and can thus create an atmosphere of empathic acceptance in the family. A parent with a less clear sense of self will be more likely to project own moods and tensions onto a mate or child, respond selectively to those moods and tensions in the other which correspond to the parent's own state, or will tend to be preoccupied with own moods and thus be less responsive to the other (Stierline, 1976). In an individuated family, interpersonal stress is less, both because there exist more realistic perceptions of each individual and because individuals are acknowledged as separate persons. There is less need for certain individuals to be or feel a certain way to meet the personal needs of another individual. A parent, for instance, is less likely to try to meet his own needs through identification with a child. When family members are distinct and autonomous, the child enjoys validation in the form of realistic feedback regarding her expression of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. She also has the freedom to expand herself by experimenting with alternative behavioral styles and, equally as important, she can receive constructive feedback from other family members to help her select successful styles. Without an individuated family environment, the lack of empathy for the child's state fails to provide the necessary ground for the child's development of self esteem and a strong self concept (see Kohut, 1971, 1977).

Hypotheses: Consequences of Individuation.

We expect that family individuation will be reflected in the family's interaction process by greater comfort with ambivalence and disagreement, and by higher levels of mutual support and validation; and that, as a result of participation in this process, children in more individuated families will be further along in their own ego development, will have greater self-acceptance and self-control, and will develop more effective social and work skills than children from less individuated families. A simplified model depicting this process is presented in Figure 1.

Parents with clearly differentiated self concepts will nourish the development of individuation in the family. Parents with high self-esteem, acting in the climate of an individuated family, will nourish the development of mutual support among family members. Mutual support refers to the communicated acceptance and approval of family members by one another. A family climate of mutual support will enhance the child's development by nurturing the child's self-esteem.

Members of individuated families, being aware of individual uniqueness and comfortable with individual differences, are comfortable also with disagreements between individuals. Thus they are more likely to validate each other's perceptions, opinions and feelings by their responsiveness to each other and by their acknowledgement of each person's authority regarding his own internal states. In other words, they are more likely to listen to each other and seek each other's opinions, and are less likely to usurp control over the other's internal states. A typical usurpation (and invalidation) is the declaration that "You feel sad" or "You think thus-and-so," in which the speaker is claiming knowledge of the other's internal state. A child who is consistently invalidated will have difficulty understanding his own internal states and is not likely to develop a strong self construct. Validating interactions nourish the child's development of a clear, differentiated self construct.

Being both aware and tolerant of differences, and comfortable with disagreement, members of individuated families are less likely to be defensive and oblique and more likely to present their own ideas and feelings clearly. Clear presentation of own ideas and feelings, along with mutual validation, will lead to enhanced problem-solving competence. This is because family members will have clear and realistic perceptions of the available information and also because, each person's need for validation having been met, they will be able to devote their energy and attention outward, to the task at hand. Experience in successful problem solving will enhance the child's development by increasing self confidence and provide her with useful models of social behavior.

In this research we make a clear distinction between validation and support. Validation is the recognition of the other's authority concerning her perceptions, opinions, and feelings: the message is "You are sane; what you are saying (thinking, feeling) makes sense." Support is the expression of acceptance of the other person: the message is "You are good; I like you." It is quite possible to have validation without support. Validating, but non-supportive parents give children clear, realistic feedback about themselves and their environment, but exhibit a neutral or negative affect withholding nurturance of self worth. It is also possible to have support without validation "I love you even though you're really crazy; I know what you think and feel even if you don't"). Validation is expected to produce positive self-esteem as the person comes to feel his worth. This conceptual distinction is matched by independent measures of the two concepts.

Concepts Measured by
Interaction Process Variables

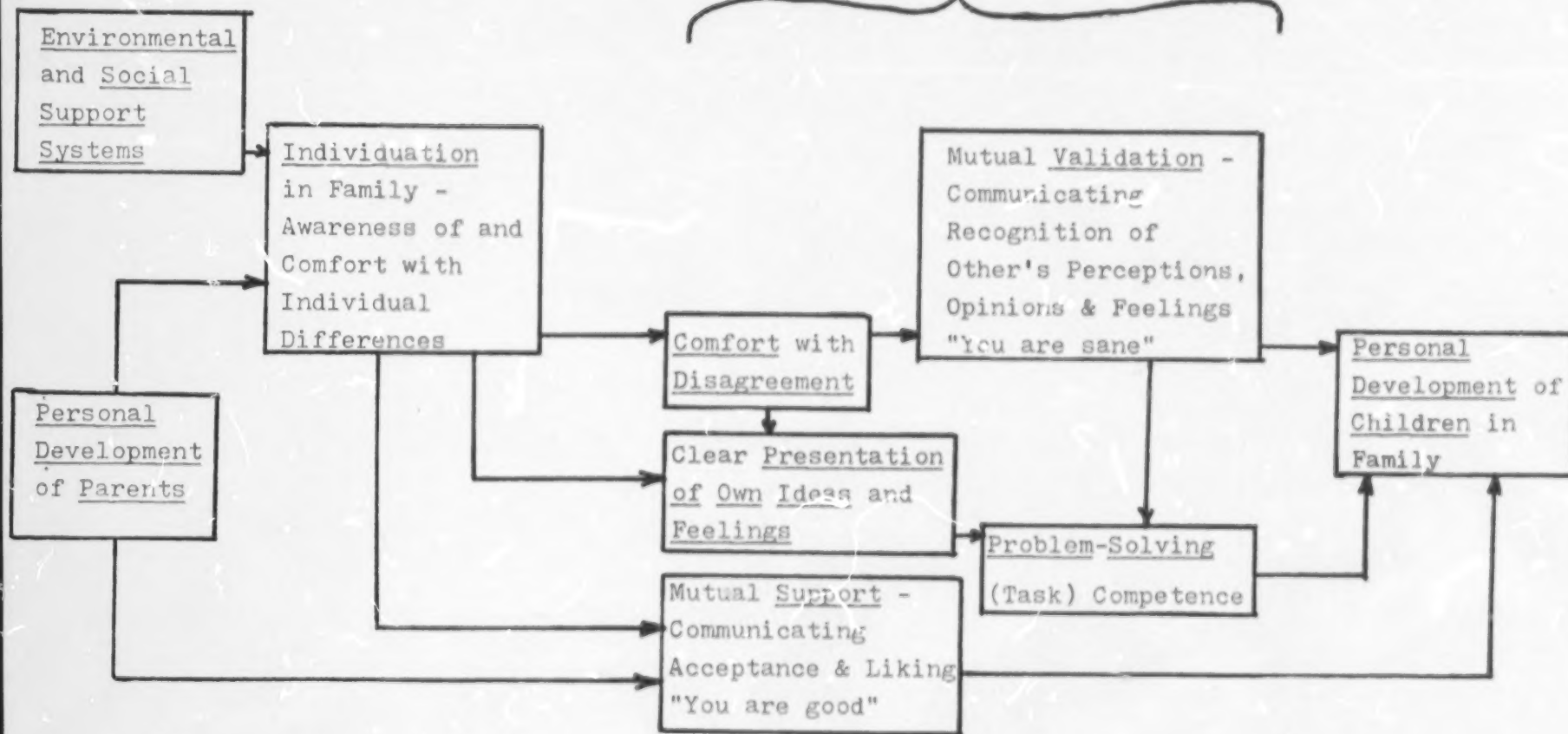


Figure 1. Family Process and Child Development

Method

Subjects

Between October, 1975 and June, 1976, 99 families participated in a structured 2-hour interview in their homes. The families were selected through the cooperation of local high schools; the area was white, middle class, suburban. We sought a homogeneous population (white, middle class, 2- or 3-child families, with a 15-17 year old girl) in order to minimize extraneous variance. The identified adolescent girl in each family had previously completed Loevinger's sentence completion measure of ego development (Loevinger, 1966; Loevinger and Wessler, 1970), the California Personality Inventory, and a sociometric questionnaire.

Initially, sociometric questionnaires were administered to about 3,500 freshmen and sophomore students in three high schools. (The sociometric measure was completed by boys and girls. It included questions relevant socioeconomic status, religion, and family structure.) 485 girls from this group were invited to come to after school testing sessions for completion of the Loevinger and CPI measures. These were all girls from 2- or 3-child families, who reported that their parents were not divorced and that they lived with both parents. 283 girls accepted this invitation, with their parents' permission; they were paid \$2 each.

Subjects were excluded from the sample if they scored higher than 31 on the Good Impression scale of the CPI (implying they might have been falsely giving a good impression), or lower than 19 on the Communality scale (implying they may have been answering items randomly); they were also excluded if they had not completed all of the measures. Families in which both parents were foreign-born were also omitted, as well as families in which there had been a divorce, families which had moved from the district or could not be contacted, and families with severe health problems. This left 215 families, of which 99 agreed to be interviewed. Families were contacted first by letter, then by phone; the person making the telephone contacts was not an interviewer; she knew nothing about the adolescent and little about the specific goals of the study. Families who declined the interview usually gave lack of time or a concern for maintaining their privacy as reasons.

There were no significant differences in the group of families which declined the interview, compared with the group which accepted, in age, father's education, mother's education, number of children in the family, religion, or position of the identified adolescent (oldest, middle, or youngest). There was a difference in the functioning of the identified adolescent, as measured by the psychological and sociometric tests. Families who declined had, on the average, adolescents who scored less well on a summary score of these measures ($t=2.30$, $df=216$; $p < .02$, 2-tailed test).

Structured Interview

The 2-hour structured interview was held in the family's home and, except for one 20-minute husband-wife segment, involved the entire family. The interviewer had not seen or talked with the family prior to the interview and knew nothing of the identified adolescent's scoring on the psychological and sociometric measures.

After the family members had given their written permission for the interview, they completed a 63-item True-False questionnaire about their family. This questionnaire was a shortened version of the Moos Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974). The questionnaire provided the basis for a revealed differences exercise (Strodtbeck, 1951, 1954). In this exercise, people were asked to consider items on the questionnaire on which they disagreed, and to try to reach a consensus. They were given 6-10 slips of paper in an envelope. Each piece of paper listed an item from the questionnaire and the answers of each mate. They were asked to discuss the item and try to reach an agreement, then mark whether the agreement was True or False - or that they still did not agree. Twenty minutes were available for the exercise.

The whole family was asked to describe the family using a semi-projective exercise, Paper Sculpting, a technique developed by L. Bell. The family was asked to arrange colored circles (for people), red and black strips (for similarity and dissimilarity between people) and blue yarn circles (boundary markers) on a white board in a way which represented the family (see Bell, 1979 for more detailed information).

Operationalization of Theoretical Variables

The theoretical variables described in Figure 1 are operationalized by paper and pencil measures, projective measures, school records, sociometric choices, and by an analysis of the process of marital and family decision making.

The primary measure of personal development of parents is Loevinger's sentence completion measure of ego development. For environmental and social support systems we have information on parent's education and occupation and also information on grandparents - age (or birthdate and age at death), residence, involvement with family. For personal development of children we have psychological (California Personality Inventory and Loevinger's sentence completion measure of ego development), social (sociometric data), and achievement (standard achievement tests and grade point averages) measures for one adolescent in each family, as well as Rotter's Internal-External measure on all children in each family.

There are two measures of individuation, the one a self-report measure taken from the Moos true-false Family Environment Scale; the other, a projective measure taken from the Paper Sculpture. The self report measure was developed by Linda Bell and Connie Cornwell. They selected 34 of the 63 items from the family description measure which were expected to differentiate individuated from unindividuated families. The scale was validated by sending the original 63-items scale to a group of experienced family therapists and asking them to select the items which they thought would differentiate individuated from unindividuated families, noting the individuated family member's answer. Ten family therapists responded, and on the basis of their answers the scale was reduced to the 24 items for which there was clear agreement. (Agreement among raters for these items ranged from 80-100%, with a median of 100%.)

The second measure of individuation is taken from the Paper Sculpture. Distance between the circles (representing family members) on the Paper Sculpture was expected to reflect the closeness felt by family members. The development of the Paper Sculpture task was encouraged by Minuchin's (1974) description of two manifestations of low levels of individuation in families -- the enmeshed and disengaged. Enmeshment is expected to be manifested in the Paper Sculpture by a low average distance among family members. Disengagement is assumed to be manifested in the Paper Sculpture by a high average distance among family members. Healthy families fall between the two, having clear individual boundaries, manifesting neither the extreme closeness of the enmeshed families nor the distance of the disengaged. Extreme distances, either very close or very distant, are taken as indicating low levels of individuation.

We have developed two different coding schemes to evaluate interaction process. The first scheme had five categories: 1) Focus on the task, 2) Positive (supportive) focus on the relationship, 3) Negative (derogatory) focus on the relationship, 4) Protective (denial of disagreement), and 5) Invalidating. After using this scheme, it was decided to create instead several scales, each coding some aspect of the interaction more precisely. The coding scheme which resulted consists of the following scales:

- 1) Topic. This scale measures two processes:
 - a. floor control (interruptions, overlaps, offering the floor to another, etc.)
 - b. focus on the task (working toward the decision, avoiding the decision, etc.)
- 2) Orientation. Is the speaker seeking information, requesting or demanding compliance making an assertion of fact, or making an assertion, in which his role as a perceiver is acknowledged (I think you're mad vs. "You're mad")?

- 3) Focus. Is the speaker talking about ideas, behavior, feelings, or states? And whose ideas, behavior, feelings or state is being discussed (self, other family member, another person)?
- 4) Acknowledgement. Are speakers acknowledged? Are questions answered? Do responses to statements convey understanding?
- 5) Affect. What is the emotional tone of the speaker's voice (positive, neutral, negative)? Is the speaker moving toward or away from the person being spoken to?

The interaction process coding scheme provides operational measures of the five interaction process shown in Figure 1. Comfort with disagreement is measured primarily by the topic code "active avoidance of the task," and secondarily by focus on non-task issues. Clear presentation of own ideas and feelings is measured by assertions of own ideas and feelings. Support is measured by affect. Validation is measured by such things as acknowledgement (+), interruptions (-) and seeking other's attitudes and feelings (+). Problem-solving is measured by the topic code focus on the task.

Results

One of the first things we looked at was the families' descriptions of themselves on the true-false family description measure. Families of adolescent girls who scored high on a summary measure of child development were compared with families of adolescent girls who scored low on this measure. This summary measure was based on a factor analysis of the CPI scales, Loevinger and the sociometric measures. Four scales were created: ego development (Loevinger), sociometric standing (popularity and mutuality of choices), self acceptance and sociability (CPI), socialization and self control (CPI). A gross measure of adolescent functioning was achieved by summing the adolescent's standard scores on these four individual scales. Families of girls scoring high on this measure described themselves as more cohesive, more expressive of feelings, more self-sufficient and less organized and controlled (see Bell and Bell, 1979a). Table 1 lists the items which discriminated between the two sets of families. The major theme differentiating the two groups seems to be one of control. The item generating the largest difference between the two groups was: "Work before play' is the rule in our family."

Table 1

Items on the Moos Family Environment Scale on Which Members of High-Scoring Families Differed Significantly ($p < .05$, two-tailed test) from Members of Low-Scoring Families*

Percent of Family

Members Marking

Item

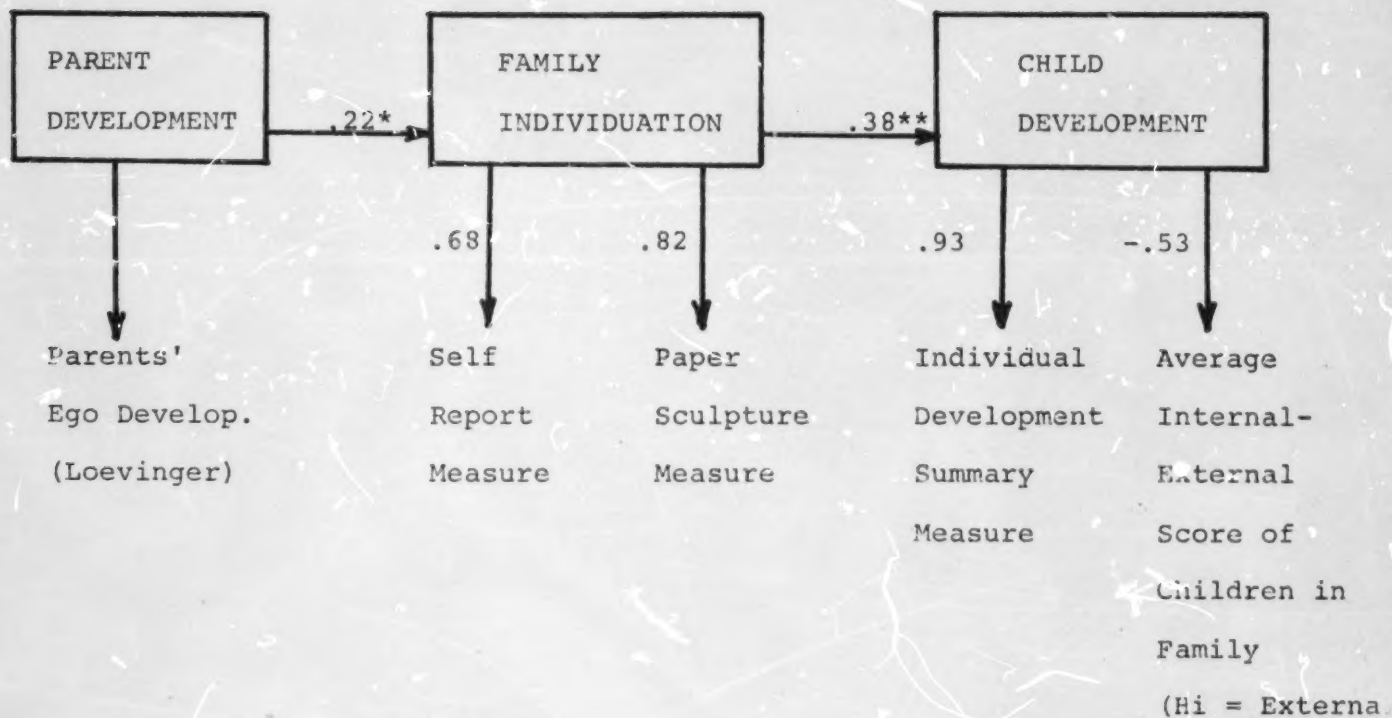
TRUE

HiSc

LoSc

54	22	(1) We come and go as we want to in our family.
65	40	(2) There are very few rules to follow in our family.
64	40	(3) We say anything we want to around home.
53	33	(4) Family members are rarely ordered around.
67	48	(5) Money and paying bills is openly talked about in our family.
90	74	(6) Family members really back each other up.
92	79	(7) There is a feeling of togetherness in our family.
98	88	(8) Family members really help and support one another.
45	83	(9) "Work before play" is the rule in our family.
31	61	(10) We rarely volunteer when something has to be done at home.
45	73	(11) You can't get away with much in our family.
45	69	(12) Each person's duties are clearly defined in our family.
42	64	(13) Activities in our family are pretty carefully planned.
38	57	(14) Family members make sure their rooms are neat.
15	34	(15) Family members sometimes get so angry they throw things.
56	75	(16) It's hard to "blow off steam" at home without upsetting somebody.
56	74	(17) There are set ways of doing things at home.
33	51	(18) Family members sometimes hit each other.
65	82	(19) Being on time is very important in our family.
67	83	(20) Dishes are usually done immediately after eating.

* There were a total of 63 items on the questionnaire.



*p = .015
 **p = .001

Figure 2. A structural Equation Model of the Effect of Parental Development on Child Development, mediated by Family Individuation.

Families of the high-scoring and low-scoring adolescents were also compared on the two measures of individuation. Both measures, the self-report measure taken from the Family Environment Scale and the measure taken from the Paper Sculpture, resulted in significant differences between the two groups in the predicted direction (Bell, Erickson, Cornwell and Bell, 1979).

A path analytical model was then used to study the relationship between parent development and family individuation, and between family individuation and child development, in the entire sample. The model is depicted in Figure 2. Parent development was operationalized by the average of the parents' ego development scores (Loevinger). Individuation as operationalized by the two measures described earlier--the self description measure and the distance measure taken from the Paper Sculpture task. For the Paper Sculpture measure, distances between family members were measured, and the average family distance was computed (correcting for family size and size of photograph). The absolute value of the standard score on this measure was taken as a measure of individuation. In other words, the more extreme the family distance (either very close or very distant) the less individuated the family members are assumed to be. Finally, child development is operationalized by (1) the average IE score, h_1 = external, for all the children in the family (Kotter, 1966), and (2) the summary score of the individual development for the identified adolescent.

A canonical analysis was used to simultaneously construct the unobserved variables Individuation and Child Development from their observed indicators. The estimate of causal effects of parental development on family individuation and of individuation on child development were significant in the predicted direction, both at the .01 level. There is no direct effect of Parent Development on Child Development, the .08 correlation between the variables is composed of a direct effect of .01, the remaining indirect effect being through individuation. These results show that the effect of Parent Development on Child Development is mediated by Individuation. That is, without recognition of individuation as a mediator, there appears to be little relationship in our data between parental development and child development.

Another way of measuring family individuation involves looking at family structure in terms of the method parents use to avoid stress between them. One process typical of unindividuated families has been called triangulation (Anonymous, 1972; Haley, 1967). The term is used here to refer to two types of coalition formation in the family. The first is a type of scapegoating (Vogel and Bell, 1968; see also Schmidt's, 1968, discussion of the united front family). When there is stress in the marital system, the husband and wife may react by focusing their attention and conversation around their child's problems, thus avoiding dealing with the conflict between them. Another method of dealing with marital stress is for one

parent to pull in a child for support, orienting conversation around the fault of the spouse. This cross-generation coalition leaves the spouse in the position of a distanced, dissimilar outsider. Over time, families develop relatively stable patterns of triangulation (Anonymous, 1972, pp. 123-124). Both forms of triangulation are invalidating to the child because she is related to out of the needs of the parents rather than out of empathy and respect for her own needs. Her own understanding of her behavior is often denied by a parent who defines the child's behavior according to the parent's needs.

Because both types of triangulation are invalidating to the child, both are expected to interfere with the development of her self concept and to restrict her social and emotional development. It was hypothesized that triangulation of a child into the marital system would be negatively related to the child's development.

Because scapegoating and coalitions are relatively difficult to observe, indirect measures were constructed of each. We expected that in any long term coalition (either a cross-generational coalition or a coalition in which parents distance the adolescent), the allies in the coalition will tend to become similar to one another and more dissimilar from the excluded person. This is because persons in the coalition are more likely to share their perceptions and attitudes with each other, including those about the family. Also, since they define themselves as similar to each other and different from the outsider, they are most likely to accept each other's perceptions and reject the outsider's views. The same process would lead the person triangled "out" to define herself as seeing things differently from the other two. We thus looked for evidence of scapegoating and cross-generational coalitions in the perceptual/attitudinal congruence among different pairs of family members.

To test the hypothesis, then, we assumed that the pattern of differences in how family members described the family climate (on the true-false Family Environment Scale) is a manifestation of their perceived closeness or distance from each other. A scapegoat child will be drawn into the position of increased disagreement with the parents as differences between child and parents are focused on and reinforced in this triangulation. When the child is in a cross-generational coalition with one parent, to the exclusion of the other, there is exaggerated agreement between coalition members and exaggerated disagreement between the child and the excluded mate.

We found that the high-scoring adolescents were significantly less likely to be involved in scapegoat or cross-generational coalitions with parents than were adolescents in the low-scoring group (see Bell

and Bell, 1979a). A study of the entire group of families also produces a significant negative relationship between triangulation and child development (see Bell and Bell, 1979b). There is some evidence, at least for the cross-generational coalition, that only one child in the family need be involved. If one child is pulled into a close coalition with one parent against the other, the other children may remain unaffected.

One of our most difficult tasks to date has been the development of appropriate and reliable interaction process coding scales. An early coding scheme was discarded after studying differences between a selected group of families, families of high- and low-scoring adolescents. The scheme presented earlier in this paper is now being used to score interaction process of couples and of families for a stratified sample of 75 of the families on whom we have data. The most interesting finding to date involves the marital interaction of the parents in families of high- and low-scoring adolescents. Parents in the low-scoring group tend to be less comfortable with discussing differences between them and, as the conversation progresses, they become less supportive of each other and less able to focus constructively on the task (see Bell, Ericksen, Cornwell and Bell, 1979). Parents in the high-scoring group tend to become less negative toward each other and better able to focus attention on the task as the discussion progresses. These results are consistent with the idea that in individuated families, individual differences are both more realistically perceived and more accepted. When confronted explicitly with disagreements between them, mates in the low-scoring group did not have the resources to approach the task in a detached, problem-solving fashion, but became increasingly negative toward each other as the task progressed.

Discussion

These results support individuation as an important concept for understanding the individual-family interface. And it suggests that family individuation is related, at least in one subculture, to child development. Families of adolescents scoring high on a summary measure of psychological and sociometric measures scored more individuated on both self-report and a projective measures. Parents of high-scoring adolescents appeared better able to discuss their differences constructively, whereas parents of low-scoring adolescents became more personally negative as the discussion progressed. This interaction pattern is consistent with the view that in unindividuated families, projections of owned or unowned aspects of the self inhibit clear perception of others' attitudes. Differences of opinion are not clearly perceived or accepted. When confronted explicitly with these differences

of opinion, mates in unindividuated families did not have the resources to approach the task in a detached problem-solving fashion.

Individuation has become a concept of major interest to clinicians, especially to those engaged in family therapy. Individuation is a system-level concept. It is based, not on attributes of individuals, but on the pattern of relations among them. The research reported here documents the impact of family individuation on child development in unlabeled (normal) families. The results encourage future efforts to develop more refined measures of individuation, and research to look more specifically at the impact of individuation on the individual.

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